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ABSTRACT

The status of and efforts toward educational equity in the bi-ethnic community in the independent nation of Fiji are examined in the context of participation in higher education, particularly at the University of the South Pacific. It is noted that at the university, which serves 11 countries and about 60 cultures, despite an affirmative action policy, there is lower participation among indigenous Fijians than among Fiji citizens of Indian origin. Research on this problem in Fiji is reviewed, including studies of secondary schools, university student achievement, and medical school participation. An analysis of the psychological, sociocultural, and institutional factors contributing to this situation is outlined, and relevant research in Fiji showing significant ethnic differences relating to some of these factors is discussed. Various affirmative action proposals addressing these three factor categories are examined. (MSE)

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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

COGNITIVE, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN FIJI (OR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN THE SOUTH SEAS)

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The paper focusses on how the South Pacific nation of Fiji, independent since 1970, is building educational equality in its bi-ethnic Community of indigenous Fijians and citizens of Indian origin.

A picture also emerges of the University of the South Pacific, serving not only Fiji but 10 other countries, scattered across a vast expanse of ocean 3 times the size of Europe, incorporating an estimated 60 cultures and 300 languages in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.

Despite an ongoing affirmative action policy, there is a lower rate of participation for indigenous Fijians in higher levels of education than for Indo-Fijians.

Research by Nabuka (1982, 1984) is reported on what some have identified as the "Fijian Education Problem". The precise nature of the so called "problem" is delineated, with reference to a year-long surveyed conducted by the Fijian Teachers Asscciation. This comprised a study of 1/3rd of all secondary schools (43), and included analysis of external examinations, and administration of questions to Principals and Form Four (Grade 10) students. There were also intensive studies of schools with a good record of exam passes, yet without an "elitist" selection policy.

Also reviewed are ethnic analysis of performance at the University foundation year (Elley and Thomson 1978 & 1979); University degree studies (Naidu, 1981) and Fiji School of Medicine (Gibbs, 1981).

Having reviewed the nature of differences in academic performance between Fijians and other ethnic groups, a framework of categories of factors to explain the differences is presented (following Baba 1982). This focusses on :

(a) Psychological factors (such as differences in Need Achievement, Cognitive Style, locus of Control, Self esteem levels, belief in trust-worthiness of others, fear of success);

(b) Socio-cultural factors (such as differences in Individualism/cooperation orientation, cultural conflict, tradition of academic scholarship); and

(c) Institutional factors (such as differences in Urban/rural balance, school facilities and Teacher quality).

Relevant research in Fiji showing significant ethnic differences on a number of these factors is discussed.

Finally, various affirmative action proposals are examined, relating to the foregoing three levels; psychological, socio-cultural and institutional.

1. Introduction

We are all aware of the growing concern and legislative focus on affirmative action, to provide equal opportunity regardless of ethnicity, sex, or other factors. Countries in the Western World have chartered their own paths toward these desirable goals. I felt that it would be useful to paint a portrait of how Fiji, with its 600,000 population in the vastness of the South Pacific ocean is coping with its bi-ethnic nature, and to detail its experiments in building equality.

In the process I hope to give you a picture of this most far flung University, which is one of the three jointly sponsoring this Conference.

The Regional University of the South Pacific

The University of the South Pacific (USP) serves not one but 11 separate countries, ranging from Tokelau with a population of 1,600 to Fiji with its 600,000. The University covers a geographic area 3 times that of Europe, although with a total land mass the same as Denmark, ranging from Cook Islands in the /in the West East to Solomon Islands/and encompassing Western Samoa, Tokelau, Niue, Tonga, Fiji, Gilbert Islands, Tuvalu, Nauru and Vanuatu. The region includes an estimated 60 cultures and 300 languages, and ranges across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.

3. The National Context: Background on Fiji

As the largest country, Fiji contributes the bulk of the students to the Regional University of the South Pacific, and is relatively the most wealthy country of the eleven. In terms of its per capita GNO, Fiji should be regarded as an "Upper Middle Income" country on the World Scale, comparable to (say) Costa Rica.

Fiji's two largest overseas earners are Sugar production and Tourism. The country has been independent since 1970. One hundred years ago Indians were brought by the British to work as Indentured labourers. After surviving great hardships, most of the Indians remained to settle permanently in Fiji. They have been joined by others from India, and nowadays, Indo-Fijians (50%) outnumber the indigenous Fijian people (45%) whose roots in Fiji go back into the mists of time.

The vast proportion of the land is owned by the indigenous Fijian people, and their land-owning rights are enshrined in the Nation's Constitution. The party currently in power is predominantly composed of the indigenous Fijian people, while the opposition is predominantly Indians. Other groups in Fiji make up the remaining 5% and include Europeans, Part-Europeans, Rotumans, Chinese and other Pacific Islanders.

4. The so-called "Fijian Education Problems"

Since Independence there has been a massive expansion of secondary education for all who can benefit from this. However, a source of concern to successive governments has been the fact that Fijians, on the whole, make less use of the Educational system at the higher levels and accordingly do not qualify to the same degree for entry to professions and highly skilled occupations.

The Government is determined to have nearly equal participation rates at all levels of education for the two main ethnic groups. It prescribes a 50:50 admission policy for the University. Providing students meet certain criteria, the University is not involved in selecting individual students. Although indigenous Fijians are admitted roughly equally to the University as sponsored students, they come with lower levels of performance than Indo-Fijians; it is no surprise therefore that they generally do not do as well in University.

To focus more precisely on the alleged "Fijian Education problem" the Fijian Teachers Association, USP Institute of Education and Suva Institute of Educational Research (of which I am now the President) organized a seminar in 1979. As a result of this, a research officer was appointed (Mr Joeli Nabuka), and the Fijian Education Achievement Project was launched.
Reports on the Fijian Education Achievement Project by both Mr Nabuka (1982, 1984) and Dr Warwick Elley (1979, 1982) provide a good assessment of the present status of Fijian Education.
Also useful are Ethnic group reports on USP performance by Ramaiya Naidu (1981) and FSM performance by W T Gibbs (1981).

5. The Fijian Education Achievement Project

The Fijian Education Achievement Project used a random sample of 41 secondary schools - with separate samples for the analysis of Fiji Junior and New Zealand School Certificate (NZSC) results.

Major conclusions are summarized here from Elley (1982) and Nabuka 1982 and 1984).

(a) The Project shows that:

(i) Fijian students do as well as or better than non-Fijians in English and Social Science. In fact Fijians do considerably better in English in the primary school (no problem in transferring from vernacular script, as for example in Hindi and Urdu). The advantage is maintained up to USP Foundation level, but is distorted by greater drop-out of Fijians after each exam.

(ii) Fijian students do <u>not</u> perform as well as Indians in Science and Maths subjects at any level. Science pass rates in Fiji Junior for 1980 were 36% (Fijian) and 44% (Indian) and in NZSC 15% Fijian and 30% Indian.

(iii) There is also a marked difference between rural and urban students. It should be noted that all of the Junior Secondary Schools are rural as are 4/5 of Fijian 4th form classes.

(b) <u>National Questionnaire Surveys of Schools</u>

Two questionnaires were administered to:

(i) Principals
(ii) Form Four pupils

A random sample of 43 schools (1/3rd of total number of secondary schools was taken. Of the 22 Fijian schools, 21 responded; and of the 22 Indian schools, 18 responded.

(c) <u>Conclusions From Principals' Questionnaire</u>

Fijian Schools are:

(a) smaller
(b) more remote

.../6

(c) Conclusions from Principals' Questionnaire

Fijian schools are:

(c) have less experienced principals
(d) are poorly equipped in respect of science, laboratories, libraries, furniture and office equipment.

However (e) classes are smaller.

(d) Significant Factors Positively Related to Fiji Junior Passes

(i) library books (r = +0.39)
(ii) ancilliary staff (r = +0.37)
(iii) adequate science labs (r = +0.32)
(iv) large classes (r = +0.31)

(e) Conclusions from Pupils Questionnaire

Nearly 3,000 pupils completed the questionnaire. (1,055 Fijian and 1,895 Indian).

(i) Books in Home

Indian pupils have access to more story books in English (33% Fijian pupils have over 20 books; 52% Indian pupils do).

(ii) Boarders

Nearly 1/3rd of Fijian pupils in Form 4 attend boarding schools, whereas no Indian students are boarders.

(iii) Living With Parents

Another 20% of Fijian 4th formers live away from home with relatives and friends. Thus only 48% live with their parents, whereas 89% of Indian students live with their parents.

(iv) Absence from School

Approximately 13% of Fijian students admitted to being absent for more than 10 days in the first 2 terms of 1981. Only 8.7% of Indian students said they were absent this often.

(v) Electricity in the Home

There was no difference between ethnic groups in access to electricity in the home - there was a figure of 52% for both groups.

(vi) Help with Homework

There was a small reported difference in the account of help with homework, as reported by both ethnic groups. Thus 31% of Fijians receive help 'often' compared with 38% of Indians.

(f) Intensive Study of Outstanding Schools

Studied in the Project were Fijian secondary schools with a good record of exam passes, yet which do not have an "elitist" selection policy.

It was shown certain qualities of the Principal were found to be most important - e.g. style of leadership, personal qualities, organizational skills, willingness to delegate and consult, and to give individual counselling and assistance to both staff and students.

6. Studies of USP Foundation Students

Elley and Thomson (1978, 1979) used Progressive Achievement Tests to test USP Foundation students on three general skills, of reading comprehension, general vocabulary and listening comprehension. (Note: USP "Foundation" is equivalent to North American High School Grade 13 or USA first year University level). Samoan and Tongan students experience more difficulty than those from Fiji and a large number of Indian students also have low language scores.

7. Ethnic Analysis of Academic Achievement of USP Students

Table 2 from a report by Naidu (1981) sets out the position of the two main ethnic groups and "others" in 1979 average performance at USP by academic discipline.

TABLE 1

Performance by Discipline of Ethnic Groups at USP for 1979

Discipline	First	Second	Third
Economics	Indians	Others	Fijians
Sociology	Others	Indians	Fijians
Geography	Others	Indians	Fijians
Admin. Studies	Indians	Others	Fijians
Maths	Indians	Others	Fijians
English	Others	Fijians	Indians
Education	No marked differences		
Chemistry	Indians	Others	Fijians
Physics	Indians	Fijians	Others
Biology	Both Indians and Fijians equal		

8. Fijian Performance at the Fiji School of Medicine(and USP in the Medical I Year)

Gibbs (1981) studied 62% of the 64 Fijian students who were admitted to the Medical I Year from 1976-80. Of the 64 admitted only 19 passed their medical course. By contrast, of the 47 overseas students who were admitted, 24 passed; and of the 82 Indians admitted, 63 passed.

9. The picture that emerges is that Fijian academic performance in English and Social Sciences is as good as other groups up to USP Foundation level, although performance in Mathematics and Science areas is lower. Fijian performance remains ahead of Indian in English, and in Biology and Education there is no difference in level. In most of the other disciplines and at the FSM the Fijian performance is lower than other groups.

10. Why Are There Differences in Academic Performance Between Fijian and Other Ethnic Groups ?

Given the summary picture set out in (9) above, why should this be ? Dr Tupeni Baba (1979 and 1982B) has provided a useful framework of categories factors which may explain levels of Fijian educational achievement in relation to other groups.

He suggests that a number of factors, while important in themselves, can be eliminated as sources of the difference. Thus research in areas such as general ability (or intelligence) and language competence has shown that Fijian and Indian scores are not significantly different (cf. Chandra, 1975A and B; Bennett, 1970, 1971, 1972; and Elley and Thomson, 1978, 1979). Nutrition and pre-school education are two other factors which are roughly equalized for both groups, and so therefore cannot be used to explain differences.

Baba categorizes some of the important variables in the following way:

(a) Psychological Factors

- Motivation/aspiration
- Need achievement
- Locus of control
- Cognitive style

(b) Socio-Cultural Factors

- Individualism/cooperation
- Cultural conflict
- Tradition of academic scholarship

(c) Institutional Factors

- Urban/rural
- Facilities
- Teacher quality

/paper, Since Baba's/both Basow (1982B and Kishor 1982, 1982B) have showed lower levels of self-esteem in Fijians as compared to Indians. Teachers know the importance of a healthy sense of self-esteem in students for successful achievement in the classroom. Students are more able to take risks (of exposing their possible ignorance or coming up with original solutions) if they have a basic sense of confidence.

Also significant is the finding by both the above authors, of a more external locus of control among Fijians than Indians. This represents a tendency to attribute one's successes and failures (say on a class test) to external factors such as luck or favouritism of the teacher. An internal locus of control is shown when one would attribute success or failure to internal factors (e.g. hard work). With an internal locus of control one would be seen as dependent on one's own efforts rather than external factors over which one has no control.

There is need for more research on achievement motivation in Fiji. Basow (1982B) using a 4-factor measure of achievement motivation showed that Fijians scored higher than Indo-Fijians on "competitiveness", particularly for males. Questions on this scale emphasize the importance of winning, doing better than others and enjoyment of competing. Fijians also score higher than Indo-Fijians on "work orientation" but the effect is only significant for females and for university students. Basow suggests that, "only Fijian students with exceptionally high work orientation scores appear to make it to university". In other research it has been shown that high "work orientation" is important to actual educational achievement, and that high competitive scores do not facilitate this.

Another line of research which has run against popular stereotypes, is the work of Stewart (1980 and 1983) where it was shown that Fijians have a lower level of belief in the general trustworthiness of people in general than do Indo-Fijians. However, the work in the Solomon Islands (Stewart, 1983) shows that subjects there trust people as "close" more than people seen as "distant". This could apply to Fijians also.

With regard to motivational factors it is suggested that Fijians do not appear to value education as much as other groups. Much more research is required on motivation, as this is a key factor. What are the pressures on bright students which keep them from succeeding ? Some psychologists have described what they call a "fear of success" - does that exist in bright Fijian youngsters ? Perhaps experience at one of Fiji's elite boarding schools may reduce the sense of isolation that a bright Fijian youngster may otherwise experience.

11. Fijian Education or Education in Fiji

We have been focussing on Fijian Education, but we should perhaps remind ourselves of what Fijian youngsters share with other youngsters, of whatever race.

The psychologist, Abraham Maslow has suggested that we can think of Universal human needs in the following way:

(a) The most basic are the physical needs (foods, water, shelter, etc.)
(b) Next are needs for a sense of love and esteem from others, and then finally
(c) A person needs to find meaning and purpose in life.

I would like to emphasize the psychological need of people to "feel good about themselves" or to have a positive sense of self esteem.

We have already noted the research studies which suggest that there may be lower levels of self-esteem in Fijians as compared to Indo-Fijians. Much of what may have to be done in Fijian Education will cost money; greater effort in this area however will in face cost nothing, and may well have enormous benefit for all children, Fijian and non-Fijian alike. The more sure an individual feels about himself and his abilities the more willing he is to place himself in potential learning situations which may involve taking a risk. The blackboard work the pupil

volunteers to do may be wrong, the teacher's question he or she answers may be laughed at by others; the object of art created may be judged harshly and so on. In each situation he or she is risking possible error or rejection.

It is quite clear from work that has been done that there is much that teachers, parents and educational administrators can do to build up a sense of confidence, competence and self esteem in the young people with whose care they are charged.

Canfield and Wells (1976) have likened the amount of a pupil's self-esteem to a stack of poker chips. Some start out the learning game with more "chips", so to speak, than others; because of their self confidence they can take the bigger risks.

Teachers I believe have a particular responsibility to make sure each child has enough "chips" to stay in the learning game, and maintain a "you can do it" attitude. Reluctance to risk failure (because of lack of self-esteem) can be manifested in withdrawn silence on the one extreme to mischievous and disruptive behaviour on the other.

Teachers (and perhaps administrators) often don't recognize the power and intrinsic superiority of praise (rather than blame) to produce behavioural change - the hard nosed advantage of praise is that

(a) the person knows what it is that is to be repeated;
(b) he feels more relaxed, confident and better able to use all of his skills after being rewarded rather than punished.

12. <u>What are some of the Alternatives in Fijian Education</u> ?

Bearing in mind the specific benefit of self-esteem enhancement to both Fijian and non-Fijian youngsters alike, what other good options present themselves in Fijian Education ?

(a) The first option is of course to do nothing. this is a perfectly respectable option for some problems, but I feel that many in Fiji would argue that this option is not a possible one in this case. In fact the existing affirmative action policies are in effect a rejection of this option. The remaining categories of options relate to the 3 levels from Baba's paper.

(b) Change at the psychological level. A number of the psychological factors listed are amenable to change through training and behaviour of adults such as teachers, assuming that one desires such change. Thus a child with a low sense of self-confidence, can learn to enhance this as stressed above and an individual can shift from an external locus of control to a somewhat more internal locus of control.

(c) Change at the Socio-Cultural and Institutional Levels. The socio-cultural factors listed by Baba may be somewhat less amendable to change. However, such change is of course possible, if it is desired. It may be useful to remember that any living, dynamic culture is also continually changing. It is in the ability to blend the best from the past with the best from the future that a culture shows its vibrancy and vitality. Some observers (e.g. Griffin, 1983 and Davis, 1980) have argued that the message reaching Fijians is ambiguous - 'stick with custom'/'change your ways'.

There is also the question as to whether the School should change to become more tolerant of group methods and project work, for example. If Fijians have a more collectivist than individual orientation, it should be possible to use teaching strategies which capitalize on this (cf. Thomas 1978 and 1982B).

Also perhaps, Fijian qualities of group loyalty could be used in peer tutoring systems - whereby brighter children help weaker ones and they then share success together.

It has been suggested to me that one of the reasons for the success of students from elite Fijian schools where a number of students are boarders is that they are thereby released from some family obligations and pressures. They are able to put in the study and homework hours because they do not have competing family obligations.

With regard to institutional factors, these have been illuminated by the interim results of the Fijian Educational Achievement Project. Fijian schools were shown in the Survey to be smaller, more remote, have less experienced principals and be less well equipped in respect of science, laboratories, libraries, furniture and office equipment. It would appear that if this is so, performance of pupils in the schools concerned would obviously be affected by this in terms of possible levels of performance.

(d) Change could of course occur on all fronts at once - i.e. change at psychological, socio-cultural and institutional levels.

13. Conclusions

The choice of options rests primarily with the people of all races in the independent nation of Fiji. Fiji, like other nations will need to carve its own solutions to the problems of equalizing educational opportunity for all its citizens. I hope that this paper has provided a window on how these concerns are being addressed in Fiji, and the South Pacific.

I would like to conclude with a Chinese proverb. As I read it, I am thinking not only of children and their educational opportunity in Fiji, but those from the many nations represented by participants at this Conference.

"Those who plan one year ahead should grow crops.
Those who plan 10 years ahead, should grow trees.
Those who plan 100 years ahead should take care of
young people".

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